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THE CULTURAL CONTENT OF ELEMENTARY AND INTERMEDIATE FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY.

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DEBATE OVER THE LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL CONTENT OF ELEMENTARY AND INTERMEDIATE COLLEGE FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS REVEALS DIVERGENCE OF OPINION OVER THE SUBJECT MATTER TO BE INCLUDED IN THE COURSES. WHILE SOCIAL SCIENCE-MINDED PEOPLE EMPHASIZE THAT CULTURE EXTENDS BEYOND LITERATURE TO THE THINKING AND BEHAVIOR PATTERNS OF OTHER PEOPLES, THEY DO NOT CONSIDER THE VAST SUPPLEMENTARY KNOWLEDGE WHICH FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS WOULD HAVE TO ACQUIRE IN ORDER TO EQUAL THE COMPETENCIES WHICH TEACHERS IN OTHER DISCIPLINES ALREADY POSSESS. THE SUBJECT MATTER IN A LANGUAGE COURSE PRIMARILY SHOULD BE USEFUL. FURTHERMORE, SINCE FOREIGN LANGUAGES HAVE TRADITIONALLY BEEN PART OF THE HUMANITIES, MASTERY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES SHOULD BE EXTENDED BEYOND LITERATURE ONLY TO SUCH ASPECTS OF CULTURE AS MUSIC, CREATIVE WRITING, ARCHITECTURE, PAINTING, AND SCULPTURE. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "FOREIGN LANGUAGE NEWS AND VIEWS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE," VOLUME 12, NUMBER 2, WINTER, 1967, AND IS BASED UPON A PAPER READ AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY FOREIGN LANGUAGE CONFERENCE (LEXINGTON, APRIL 30, 1966). (GJ)

(This article is based upon a paper read at the University of Kentucky Foreign Language Conference, April 30, 1966.)

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When students are acquiring the basic foreign language skills of listening comprehension, oral expression, reading, and writing, what should they listen to, talk about, read, and write?

That this question is important is indicated by two items in a list of "some top priority tasks" compiled by the Advisory Committee of the Modern Language Associations Foreign Language Program and published in the P M L A of September, 1965. At the head of the list we find: "Further research on supplementing the study of literature with the study of other aspects of culture." Item no. 8 is: "The production of materials for the study of culture (including literature) at advanced secondary-school and intermediate-college levels."

There are several possible answers to the question. One answer: The function of foreign language instruction in the first two years is to teach a foreign language; what the material is does not matter much; a good teacher will make it interesting. Use whatever your textbook happens to offer." At Dartmouth College the first term course is described as "an introduction to French as a spoken and written language," with no indication of what one speaks, reads, or writes about. The catalogue of the University of Kentucky tells us simply that in French 101 "a short reader is introduced" and in French 102 "several short readers are translated," while in the second year the emphasis seems to be on the language, with "supplementary reading." (The University of Kentucky courses have been reorganized since this was written.) The offerings in the first two years of German and Spanish are equally vague. All this is true in the catalogues of several other colleges and universities. Descriptions of courses could be more informative and enticing.

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A second answer is to include language and literature. In the second year of French, at the University of New Hampshire, one finds "intensive and extensive reading of complete texts of intrinsic literary and intellectual worth." At Dartmouth, in the second and third terms of the first year, there is "extensive reading of French classics of intermediate difficulty" and "the study of representative major works." The principal second-year course is an "Introduction to French literature and to Methods of Literary Study." At Harvard, in Intermediate German, "works of literary merit and cultural interest will be used," with much the same thing in French and Spanish. At Princeton, the objectives are "to speak and read a foreign language and enable the student to read representative works with critical awareness." The conservative "language and literature" formula determines the content of courses in many institutions.

Yet in foreign language elementary courses, students are obviously not ready for the genuine study of literature. Even if the 3-hour a week course has been replaced by 4 or 5 hours a week during two semesters, are the students in the intermediate course, including those who have had their previous preparation in secondary schools and are taking the intermediate course in their freshman year, ready to devote all their time to literature, without much knowledge of the country whose literature is to be studied? Is not the introductory survey course in literature better placed in the third year of foreign language study, as it is in many colleges and universities?

A third answer to the question is to devote the first two years, along with language, to a study of the culture of a country. This is well stated in the University of Kentucky Catalogue: "One of the fundamental aims of language study must be to broaden and deepen our acquaintance with the world about us by presenting new aspects of its culture and a more intimate knowledge of its peoples through the medium of foreign languages and literatures." The "new aspects of its culture" should, we think, precede the study of literature. But "culture" has become one

of the most common and most ambiguous words used today in the discussion of the goals or the concent of foreign language teaching.

The importance of the study of culture (with a small c) is by no means a new idea. In his history of "The Teaching of French in the United States," published in 1963 in the French Review, George B. Watts speaks of new methods of language instruction which originated in Europe, were introduced into the United States even before the year 1900, and stressed culture. By 1911, he says, "realia" was a popular word, and "the number of courses in foreign civilization was increasing rapidly."

Coleman, in his famous Report of 1919 that has been so frequently damned because of its espousal of the reading objective, listed as one of the desired aims of foreign language study "progressive development of a knowledge of the foreign country, past and present, and of a special interest in the life and characteristics of its people."

One could find numerous applications of these ideas. In the 1930 revision of the Fraser and Squair French Grammar, Carnahan's reading passages cover geography, sight-seeing in Paris, and a tour of the French provinces and regions. The popularity of the "cultural approach" is illustrated by the titles of two books: Hendrix and Meiden: Beginning French, a Cultural Approach, and Armitage and Meiden: Beginning Spanish, a Cultural Approach.

It is rather surprising that the value of including culture in elementary and intermediate foreign language courses had to be rediscovered and its importance proclaimed and promoted in 1960 and ensuing years. The point is that the original "cultural approach" was too practical to satisfy cultural anthropologists and social scientists. The new emphasis on a different definition of "culture" was given a strong impetus at a conference on "The Meaning and Role of Culture in Foreign Language Teaching," held at Georgetown University in March, 1961, and attended by all those who were to conduct courses in culture at the N D E A

Institutes in the summer of 1961. Margaret Mead and Laurence Wylie were there. Professor Wylie asserted that "the most important element in cultural understanding is the way people conceive and feel about a culture...Facts alone are not enough. The values and attitudes behind the facts are more important to cultural understanding." Most of the Conference was taken up with consideration of what should be included in courses on culture at the N D E A Institutes and so passed on through the teachers attending the Institutes to students in foreign language courses. What should be included? The representatives of the various languages appeared to recommend that courses on culture in the Institutes should cover all aspects of civilization. By implication, the cultural content of all foreign language teaching in secondary schools and colleges should include not only facts but also "values and attitudes."

Since the Conference, the main ideas have been expressed again and again. "The teaching of contemporary foreign life and institutions is important to our monocultural students," says Elton Hocking (MFL Bulletin, October, 1965.) And he says also: "If international understanding is to be achieved, it requires our help through an honest and sympathetic presentation of our neighbor's way of life. The foreign language alone is not enough, but the language in its full cultural content can do much to achieve understanding." Professor Hocking speaks of "the normal daily life of another people: their beliefs, their attitudes and interests, their likes and dislikes and taboos, their institutions and their way of doing things, their opinions about us and about others."

Jacques Hardré (in the French Review, October, 1965) echoes this idea: "Students expect, and reasonably so, to be instructed in the historical and contemporary French way of life and to receive information in the economic, political and artistic fields."

Donald D. Walsh (at the Foreign Language Conference, Gearhart, Oregon; November 3, 1965) declared that "we must pay attention not only to the communication skills but also to the cultural and intellectual content of the communication." By "culture," he explained, he means "those elements in the traditions and beliefs, scale of values, and behavior patterns of a people that cause it to react to reality in a distinctive way. Why does the Frenchman or Spaniard react in a different way from the Englishman, American, or German to such matters as sports, food, living in the country, politics, or love?" There are in our classes, he says, "students whose intellectual interests do not lie in literature but in psychology, history, political science, or natural science...It is our responsibility, as interpreters of the culture of the country whose language we teach, to make books in these fields available to those among our students who have a special interest and knowledge in them."

Such seems to be the "official" 1965-1966 doctrine of what should be the cultural content of elementary and intermediate foreign language courses. There are a number of important objections to the acceptance of the doctrine and its implications.

First difficulty. How can we put real substance into the glittering generalizations of "international understanding," of "our neighbors' way of life," of "attitudes and interests, likes and dislikes, scale of values, behavior patterns?"

Second difficulty. Very few American teachers of foreign languages are competent to discuss such topics. If they really wanted to perform their tasks adequately, they would have to spend an enormous amount of time changing themselves into teachers of cultural anthropology, political science, and sociology. "The foreign language teacher," we are told, "should not neglect area studies of non-literary and non-linguistic nature. It is highly desirable that he add courses

in anthropology, sociology, government and geography, and in the history of the people who speak the language he is studying." ("Modern Foreign Languages for New Hampshire Schools," State Dept. of Education, Concord, N.H.) That's five courses for the undergraduate to crowd into a crowded program or for the teacher to take in addition to courses in language and literature. Without the courses, the amount of private reading necessary would be terrific.

Third Difficulty. Presumably the courses in anthropology, sociology, government, geography and history are now being given in English for students who are not preparing to be foreign language teachers. Presumably they are being given in a professional manner by experts. Would language teachers be happy in doing, in a relatively amateurish and superficial way, what their colleagues can do much better?

Fourth Difficulty. If certain students who have "a special interest and knowledge" in "psychology, history, political science or natural science" seek "books in these fields," why is it not the responsibility of the professors or teachers in such fields to make books available to them, rather than the foreign language teachers? Besides, what are reference librarians for?

My final answer to my original question is based upon two principal considerations. First, in elementary courses, the teaching of a foreign language in its fourfold aspects is of prime importance. Secondly, the subject-matter used in such teaching should be varied and useful. Students have a variety of interests. They all appreciate a practical introduction to a foreign country. Use a textbook which presents a few facts about the physical aspects of the country, about its history, its institutions, its daily life. Supplement what is in the book by your experiences and observations when you went abroad. Avoid what Professor Arthur B. Beattie terms "an excessive

emphasis upon the social sciences as an essential element in foreign language teaching... The good teacher," he continues, "inevitably supplies, out of his own background and experience, and as the occasion calls for it, those elements of culture which are pertinent and useful, without formally writing into the curriculum various units on 'the total way of life of a people'."

Carry this offering of practical culture on into the intermediate year, in which, along with the development of language mastery, the main emphasis should be on what can be called the Humanities as distinguished from the social sciences. In a typical university organization, foreign languages are in the Division of the Humanities. Let them stay there! The Humanities are comprehensive enough in themselves to satisfy varied interests and to permit teachers to make use of varied skills and accomplishments. Some teachers may have a special interest in art, others in music, others in literature. A few literary works - but not a survey course in literature - could well be included in the intermediate course, partly in order to arouse in students a desire to become better acquainted with a foreign literature the following year.

Professors of government, economics or sociology are not being called upon to devote a large part of their courses to instruction in French, German, or Spanish. Foreign language teachers should resist the demand that they teach government, economics, or sociology in their language courses.

According to the new National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities, established in 1965 by Act of Congress, the term "humanities" includes music, creative writing, architecture, painting, sculpture and so on as well as literature. It is in the field of the Humanities that one finds Culture in the best sense of the word, and it is within this field that the foreign language teacher should work.

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